

## **Restructuring Of Nigeria's Mentality: An Analysis Of Ahmed Yerima's *Atika's Well* And Shehu Sani's *When Clerics Kill***

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### **Abstract**

Right from the First Republic, Nigeria has been faced with the dearth of responsible governance, and the quest for strategies that will ensure the delivering of good managers who will utilise the huge human and natural resources for the development of the citizens and the country. This has led to complaints and calls for restructuring. Various geographical zones talk about restructuring, resource control, autonomy, referendum and the likes. Good as these calls for change are, none or perhaps very few seem to have pondered on the fact that the six geopolitical zones which constitute Nigeria have at one time or the other produced people who held positions of leadership in governance. This paper, therefore, examines Yerima's *Atika's Well* and Sani's *When Clerics Kill* to demonstrate the need for sound character development of all political office holders who daily manage the affairs of the nation. Through the lens of sociological criticism, this paper explores the relationship between literature and society in the analysis of Yerima's *Atika's Well* and Sani's *When Clerics Kill*. The findings of this study show that Yerima and Sani fictionalize the socio-political, religious and economic issues of Nigeria among other things and lay bare the fact that political office holders in Nigeria since independence have been very corrupt and selfish. Hence, the paper advocates mental restructuring should precede any other form of restructuring the people may carry out if meaningful development is to take place.

**Keywords:** Restructure, Nigerian's mentality, meaningful development, leadership and corrupt.

### **Introduction**

The narrative of restructuring Nigeria has dominated the public domain for years now. The intensity of each agitation increases daily. While some geopolitical zones call for restructuring, others feel there is nothing wrong with the current structure. So, there have been discordant tones. The argument has been that political office holders from the first republic till date have failed to take into consideration the interest of the various geopolitical zones that constitute Nigeria. They allow ethnicity, religious sentiments and their selfish desires to becloud their sense of vision for an ideal society. This accounts for why a president will

appoint most of the major stakeholders of his cabinet only from a geopolitical zone at the detriment of others, even in a democracy. This has created a plethora of problems and agitations for the restructuring of the nation.

It was against this backdrop that the people of Niger Delta for instance have been calling for a referendum. Ken Saro Wiwa and his other Ogonis fought and died for this cause. The Igbos have been agitating for same. Hence, the need for committed leaders, men and women who will allow the interest of the nation to override their personal and ethnic interests.

The aim of this research is to provide the needed insight that at one time or the other, the various zones of Nigeria had produced leaders both at the local, state and national levels, and they all failed to manage the affairs of the nation well due to greed and avarice. So, to restructure Nigeria without first restructuring the mentality of Nigerians will be an exercise in futility.

Restructuring Nigerian's mentality is a call for attitudinal change. This perspicacity is very necessary for it will help the people to re-examine themselves, their leaders and the quest for restructuring. This will help the people to understand that though there is need to restructure the nation as the people are demanding, the first and perhaps the best form of restructuring is to re-order the mindset of the people in terms of attitudinal change, which will produce men and women of integrity to manage the nation's affairs.

On restructuring, Nuhu Yaqub (2016) citing Arthur Nwakwo explains that:

Restructuring does not mean the merging of states, as some people would prefer: Rather, it is a thoroughgoing process that allows each region to control its resources and pay royalties to the central government. It is a process that is anchored on the principle of "from each according to each according to his needs" (9).

He further avers that restructuring will help us to stem the tide of restiveness in many parts of the country. It will also resolve the questions of citizenship, religion, resource control and fiscal federalism. Though these arguments are logical and reasonable to see the need for restructuring in order for each geopolitical zone to effectively manage its resources, the

argument of this paper is that none of the six geopolitical zones that constitute the Nigerian nation is free of the monumental corruption that had bedeviled the nation since independence.

People must stop stealing and defrauding the nation and work towards the common good of all. Their attitude towards materialism must change. Indeed as former President Olusegun Obasanjo as cited by Njoku (2000) affirms:

There was corruption! Corruption! And corruption! Everywhere and all the time! Corruption was not only rife, it had eaten so deeply into the marrow of our existence that looters and fraudsters had become our heroes, and it seemed we could no longer place any faith in honesty and decency and hard work.

Obasanjo vividly captures the Nigerian society in the postulation above for today criminals are seen as heroes. It is the mentality of the people. The people value wealth so much that nobody talks about the manner through which men enrich themselves. It is evil to loot the common treasury. It is evil to defraud one another.

Jude Agho (2014) agrees with the position of this paper that the six geopolitical zones are not free from the production of bad leaders who have been defrauding the nation since 1960. This is why the position of this article is that Nigeria needs the restructuring of the mind first rather than political, resource control, religion, etc. This is because if Nigeria restructures politically without mental restructuring, those who tore the nation apart and underdeveloped it will go to their various zones and continue the vicious cycle of

liquidation, defrauding the system. So, value re-orientation is all that the nation needs for now.

The purpose of art is to re-order the society. African writers and its critics have observed that corruption remains African's major problem. Hence, it remains the thrust of most African literary writers. This accounts for Agho's position that art:

has not only been employed to characterize the abuse of power by the ruling elite class, it has also addressed the concomitant problems of political instability, corruption and such endemic social ills as unemployment, poverty and prostitution (95 – 96).

The purpose is to give the desired direction to the people in order to avoid the pitfalls of the past and present and determine their today and take charge and project an ideal future which all will be proud of.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Scholars from different ages have over time avow the existence of complex and dynamic relationship between literature and society. The literature of every society is indeed a duplicate of that particular society. The analysis of this discourse is hinged on sociological theory. This is an approach that investigates the social context of a work of art and the audience participation in the inevitable task of shaping literature. Akporokah Harrison Alierie and Monday O. Akpojishi (2017) in talking about the writer and his influence on society cite Austin Warren and Rere Welleck who note that "the writer is not only influenced by society, he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it. People may model their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines" (153). Karin Baber, as

cited by Juliana Okoh (2018) posits that "every work of literature reveals a configuration of beliefs and assumption about the nature of the world" (16). Indeed critical analysis of any literary work must consider the intention of the writer in question, the spirit of the age, and the materials presented or issues raised in that particular work.

This paper is therefore, an attempt to explicate that the restructuring of Nigerian's mentality is very essential in order to re-engineer the people's way of thinking, thereby creating the desired attitudinal change for development through an analysis of selected plays of Ahmed Yerima and Shehu Sani, playwrights who find themselves in a society where political office holders are interested in family and self-aggrandizement than the welfare of the masses hence their calls for a re-orientation of the people.

#### **Textual Analysis**

The thrust of this paper is the need to restructure Nigerian's mentality in order to ensure that men of integrity manage the affairs of the nation for the good of all. The primary texts for analysis are Yerima's *Atika's Well* and Sani *When Clerics Kill*.

Ahmed Yerima is one of the most outstanding Nigerian playwrights of the last decade. He is a playwright, researcher, a teacher and theatre manager. He is a native of Biu of North-east, Nigeria. Yerima has written over a score of plays and he is still writing. He is consistent with his thematic construct. He talks about the need for honesty in all realms of life. In *Atika's Well*, Yerima talks about contentment, the need for honesty in all our dealings and brotherly love and the need to create a conflict free world.

Shehu Sani, the second playwright whose play serves as a primary text for this analysis is also from the northern part of Nigeria. He is a playwright, a former senator, and a rights activist. He has several works to his credit. In *When Clerics Kill*, Sani tries to explore the politics of religiosity and the culture of extremism and intolerance. As a playwright, he calls for a cultivated mind.

#### **Yerima and the Restructuring of Nigerians' Mentality**

In *Atika's Well*, Yerima explores the state of the nation by stating how a driver, in the service of a king, amasses the entire fortunes of the state to himself just as the Nigerian leaders do the fortunes of the nation.

KAMA: We are not happy. How could one common man control the entire fortunes of the royal family... I mean, how could a driver build a house as big as this? With what funds? ...

DAGU: We too were surprised at our son's sudden wealth.

The car... the shop... and now this new house.

Atika represents Nigerian leaders. His employment as a driver to the king is akin to our leaders who are supposed to manage the affairs of our great nation. Atika's fortunes are beyond what a common driver can acquire within the specified time. The fact that his family were shocked at their son's sudden wealth shows the degree to which he had defrauded the king, a symbol for the nation. This is indeed the state of the nation. The king entrusted him with everything in the land. Atika was given even the black box which contains the king's land deals. Atika elevated himself to the position of a prince and sold the land of the community for self-

aggrandizement. The following dialogue gives credence to this argument:

SALU: Yes, we want to see Prince Atika

IDAPA: Prince Atika?

SALU: Yes. Just three days ago, he pointed this new house to us. He said we could meet here today; that he would not be in the palace when we come at this hour of the day ...

IDAPA: He is our son. You can tell us what the problem is...

SALU: Very well, we bought a parcel of land from him. We had paid him half of the money and secured the land. But today, I took my master to see the land and we met the two security men we put there to guard the place, dead. Their stomachs swollen, filled with water, as if they had drowned and their tongues pinkish black, pulled out and tied round their necks ...

DAGU: Ole! The spirit of the goddess, forgive us.

Yerima also talks about Nigerian leaders abusing the trust the people have for them by their uncanny desire for women. Atika's sexual spree with Ruka his cousin is an example. Sex ought not to have been part of their relationship as cousins. He used his position and influence to abuse her sexually:

RUKA: He raped me. Then, asked me to keep quiet about the incident. We took oath of secrecy by the river and invited the river goddess, Ole, to be witness to our oath. He promised to love me till death and to take care of our sons. On my part, I was never to tell anyone the truth. Then ... then... he went and married this one (pointing to RAMATO who is still lying on the floor).

Rape is a criminal offence in every decent society. Atika raped Ruka his cousin and made her take an oath of secrecy.

Nigeria as a nation is raped daily by her leaders who are supposedly called to serve. There is need to re-order the mindset of Nigerians. This is Yerima's main concern in *Atika's Well*.

In Nigeria, people saddled with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the country see it as an opportunity to enrich themselves and not to serve. In a decent society, leadership is to serve. In an ideal society, whether one is a politician, civil servant or working anywhere, the most valuable thing one can really do is to serve, put the nation and others first before self. This is why the character of Nigerians needs re-engineering. The way Nigerians think and act need to be re-ordered for the nation to produce selfless leaders whose reign will place the nation on a good footing in the comity of nations.

#### **Sani and Mental Restructuring**

Nigeria is a multi-religious nation. Religion plays a very significant role in the affairs of the country. It is important to mention at this juncture, that it has been employed by various leaders of this country to serve their selfish desires. Hence, the topicality of Sani's *When the Clerics Kill*. The playwright x-rays the activities of some of clerics of the two major religions: Christianity and Islam, and how they make the nation uninhabitable.

JOHN: That was sufferance. It does not matter even if they are here a thousand years. They are still settlers. We are the indigenous people here. That is where our ancestors are. These settlers came from the desert. They are

Muslims, we are Christians. Know this, women.

MARTHA: (*Clapping her hands surprisingly*) I am really surprised. Since we married I have never heard you talk like this. We lived together with these people as one. We respect each other and now why this pestilent...

JOHN: (*Tries to convince the wife, cuts*). Hey! Hey!! Stop this. Don't deceive yourself; these people hate us. They call us infidels or unbelievers. They took over our farmlands and built big houses and shops and ...

MARTHA: (*Cuts in*). My dear, these thoughts of yours are strange to me. Since you started attending these meetings at the house of Pastor Gatari, I have not been comfortable. I never like that man and his sententious postulations and it's now clear to me that he is indoctrinating you (14 – 15).

The dialogue between John and Martha, a Christian couple, who had been at peace before now speaks volume of what damage religion can cause among people who have been living harmoniously. Martha, the wife in the opening dialogue of the play states

(*In a concerned tone*) My dear, these days you appear so worried and restless and you are not the uxorious man I know. Have I done anything wrong or could someone have upset you? (13).

The play opens on the note that something is wrong with her husband's behaviour. The ideal wife, she is correctly attributes the husband's strange behaviour to his encounter with Pastor Gatari, who is indoctrinating the Christians to make them war against the Muslims they have lived peacefully with for centuries.

MARTHA: How do you call people with whom we have lived for so long, even with our great-grandfathers settlers. I don't understand what you are trying to say. (14).

This, indeed, is a multimillion naira question. Why will these people be set against each other? Pastor Gatari who is engineering these evils is very deceptive.

JOHN: The forum is out to protect and preserve our Christian values and culture and to free us from the impending dominance of the Moslems. And to save our towns from being Islamized...

MARTHA: (*Calmly*) My dear you have to be careful and all of you in that group should be careful. Pastor Gatari has been leaving outside this town for over 20 years. Now he is back with this ... I'm warning you that what you people are doing will not set us free from anything but will only create division within ourselves. (15).

This is the state of the nation. Pastor Gatari needs recognition having been away for 20 years. Hence, as chairman of Indigenous People Forum, a societal platform he created for political reasons, he preaches falsehood. The likes of Gatari always make sure that their wives and children are safe in faraway Europe while setting fire at home.

The fact that Nigerians are incurably religious make them fall prey to the antics of the likes of Gatari. Thus the playwright raises awareness in the life of the people. Martha in the Christian world and Tani, a Moslem are agents of the ideal. Martha and Tani are virtuous women. They humbly try to tell their husbands the truth, and persuasively point to their husbands the need for harmony among the

various religious groups. Sani stresses this in his play, showing how women serve as agents of change and peaceful co-existence. He tries to educate the masses about their leader's mindset. He talks about their selfish desires and how they fool the people to achieve them. He also inundates them with the fact that even in religious circles, the people need to be very careful by critically examining whatever they are told rather than accepting everything they are told without finding out the truth. Martha, a Christian and Tani a Muslim are typical examples of virtuous women. Though they belong to different religions, they were able to see the errors in their husband's perceptions and tried to put them right with all humility. The following dialogue elucidates this clearly:

TANI: My dear, I saw the C.D. of Sheikh Jabbar's sermon or is it preaching you brought home and I listened to it all.

SAGIR: How did you find it?

TANI: Scary, rating and his vision a phantasm!

SAGIR: What do you mean by "scary"?

TANI: (*Looks worried*) I thought that man is a man of peace, but all he has been saying in the preaching is nothing but promoting hate, intolerance and fanning the embers of discord.

SAGIR: (*Casualty*) What is these about hate and intolerance?

TANI: He was just chapter by chapter attacking the Christians and saying so many discomfoting things and in my view, that is not good for our kind of multi religious and multi ethnic society. His utterances are so solipsist. (22)

Tani in this dialogue tries to educate her husband who seems to have been indoctrinated. She faults being a solipsist and cautions that it is wrong for anybody to feel that his or her existence is the only certainty. She condemns

in its entirety the preaching of Sheikh Jabbar and stressed that the husband should stop attending Jabbar's Talsir in order not to be convinced by the psychopath, he is. She sees him as one who is extremely callous, always getting his way without any feeling or remorse. Incidentally, Sheikh Jabbar is a religious leader and if leaders get their way, not bothering whose toes they step on, and can preach sermons that can cause unimaginable havoc, such leaders need to have their mindsets restructured. This is because only a restructured or regenerated being can restructure the society for the good of all.

Further in their dialogue, Sagir and Tani show how they think and act.

SAGIR: As far as I am concerned, all his arguments are valid. The Christians in the town are infidels.

TANI: When did they start becoming infidels? Is it when Sheikh Jabbar started coming to this town to preach? How can you call them infidels, such good people we have been living together in peace with for generations?

SAGIR: Yes, we have lived with them for generations but they still refer to us as settlers and call themselves indigenes.

TANI: (*Persuasively*) Oh, Dear why, are you so sentimental about that? I think you should be very careful with this Sheikh Jabbar. He seems he is getting into your head. We are living in peace with the Christians, a preacher who came all the way from Kano must not come here and sow the seed of hate among us. (22 – 23).

It is glaring from this dialogue that some of the leaders of the two major religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam, are spreading

falsehood, indoctrinating their followers to do the wrong thing which remains detrimental to the development of Nigeria. Unfortunately, these leaders are supposed to be servant leaders, who should be apostles of truth. Sani, the playwright, demonstrates how various religious leaders in Nigeria work against the unity and development of Nigeria. They preach falsehood to their followers and make them take up arms against those who believe differently. This is a call for anarchy, especially in a secular and multi-religious society like Nigeria. The playwright in the following dialogue also shows how clerics turned politicians allow politicians use them against the poor masses of Nigeria.

TANI: About other things you said the government or, the governor of the state is doing, they could be true but I think it's good you separate the mischievous conduct and antics of politicians from the imperative of our good relations with our Christian neighbours.

SAGIR: How?

TANI: To me, politicians are simply playing games with religion, the governor inclusive. The poor Christian masses are as oppressed as the Muslim masses. As our poor find it difficult to pay rent and tuition fees for their children, so also do the Christian poor. The politicians are just playing a dangerous game with religion. The Muslim and Christian masses are all victims of a very exploitative and manipulative political elite. If trouble comes, it's the poor Muslims and the poor Christians that will die (28).

Most Reverend Emmanuel Badego (2020) talks about interrogating the leaders of the nation thus:

We must question and interrogate the role of those representing us. Interrogate

the performance of the governors, senators, local government chairmen, civil servants, such that if they don't perform, people can exercise their franchise and show them that they are not irreplaceable (25).

He further states that what "the church is called to do is to educate, enlighten and enable the people with the power of prayer." (25). This indeed is the primary function of every religious organization. If the religious leaders are sincere to their callings, the society will be better than it is now. Sani, in furtherance of his argument on the need for mental restructuring in *When Clerics Kill*, explicates that Nigerian leaders are indifferent to the plight of the people. This contradicts the vow they made in their oath of office. The following dialogue gives credence:

AIDS I: Well, your Excellency, some months ago, I wrote a portentous memo to you, I drew your attention to the fact that the attitude of our security agents can lead to a lot of consequences. The police raided a mosque in the east suburb and shot at the Imam. An Imam that has over time thousand students. Logically, such people can't just fold their arms and watch.

GOVERNOR: You are right. But what has that got to do with blasting a bomb in a crowded place. (64)

Entering a mosque and killing an Imam, whether his followers are few or many is an aberration. It becomes very annoying when the police claims that as law enforcement agents, they got hints that the Cleric was hiding weapons, went there, and found three guns which the Governors' Aid I said were like the ones allocated to the police. "They were strong suspicious that, you (*the police*) planted them

to implicate, arrest and jail him for gun running" (65). All these are indications of how the society is. A law enforcement agency that permits planting a gun in one's house in order to implicate him needs mental reform or restructuring. It becomes more disturbing when the police mentions that even the church is being bombed.

POLICE: Excuse me, Your Excellency, it is an emergency alert (*he receives the call*) A suicide bomber just crashed into a church killing many worshippers. (65)

The police's report to his Excellency above talks about the destruction of innocent citizens. Mosques and churches are attacked by suicide bombers. The playwright has it that "a suicide bomber just crashed into a church killing many worshippers" (65). It is instructive to stress that such suicide bombers also die in the process. It is also instructive to state that these suicide bombers attack Christians and Moslems which creates certain puzzles. That the bombers are in suicide missions show how inhuman the act is.

Sani, as a playwright tries to re-construct the world around him in order to make man consider the evils of his actions, the consequences on him as an individual and the entire society, and to decide to be upright henceforth. Whoever reads Sani *When Clerics Kill* must pause for a while and see the need to rethink. Sani, the rights activist further buttresses his argument about restructuring Nigerian's mentality castigates the inability off Nigerians leaders to put things right. The following dialogue between the government and his Aids vividly illustrates it better.

AIDS II: Your Excellency, the violence between Muslim and Christians keep lingering for a number of reasons. First is the very fact

that successive governments including yours have set up many probe panels the reports of which have never been implemented.

GOVERNOR: Go on.

AIDS III: Many times high profile politicians, religious leaders and traditional rulers have been implicated and indicted but you have consistently shied away from prosecuting them. And this gives ground for impunity. (72).

The relevance of the above dialogue to this discourse is that it explains the magnitude of the nation's predicament. A situation where successive Nigerian governments have failed to prosecute those who underdeveloped the nation for whatever reasons remains inimical to the collective wellbeing of the people. Hence, the call for the restructuring of Nigerians mentality

which will bring about the much desired right leadership.

### Conclusion

It has been argued in this discourse that there is the dearth of good governance in Nigeria since independence, hence the call for restructuring from the various sections of the country. Although the calls are necessary, there is need for the restructuring of Nigerians mentality first. The call for attitudinal change of Nigerians or mental restructuring should precede any other forms of restructuring if meaningful development is to take place in Nigeria and if the country must join the comity of developed nations.

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